

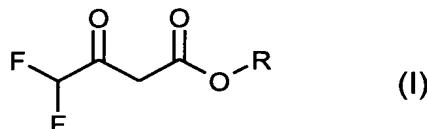
AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

Please change the heading at page 15, line 1, from "Patent claims" to
--WHAT IS CLAIMED IS--

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions of claims in the application.

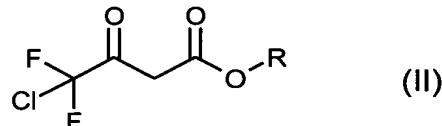
Claims 1-10 (canceled)

-- Claim 11 (new): A method of preparing alkyl esters of 4,4-difluoroacetoacetic acid of formula (I)



in which R represents alkyl,
comprising

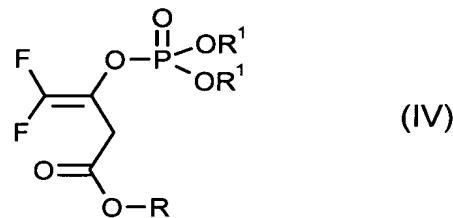
(a) in a first step, reacting an alkyl ester 4-chloro-4,4-difluoroacetoacetic acid of formula (II)



in which R represents alkyl,
with a trialkylphosphite of formula (III)

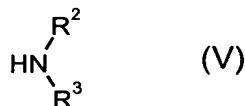


in which each R¹ independently of the others represents C₁-C₄-alkyl,
to give a alkylphosphonate of formula (IV)



in which R and R¹ have the meanings described above,

(b) in a second step, reacting the alkylphosphonate of formula (IV) with an amine of formula (V)



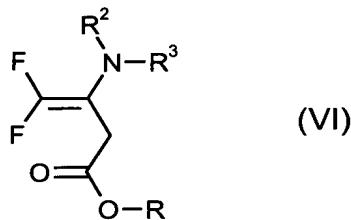
in which

R^2 and R^3 independently of each other represent hydrogen or C₁-C₈-alkyl, or R^2 and R^3 together represent -CH₂-CH₂-O-CH₂-CH₂-, -CH₂-CH₂-S-CH₂-CH₂-, or -CH₂-CH₂-N(R^4)-CH₂-CH₂-, and

R^4 stands for hydrogen or C₁-C₈-alkyl,

optionally in the presence of a diluent,

to give an enamine of formula (VI)



in which R , R^2 , and R^3 have the meanings described above,

and

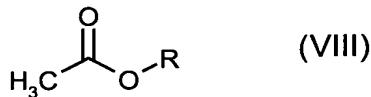
- (c) in a third step, condensing the enamine of formula (VI) in the presence of an acid.

Claim 12 (new): A method according to Claim 11 in which the alkyl 4-chloro-4,4-difluoroacetooacetate of formula (II) used in the first step is prepared by reacting an alkyl chlorodifluoroacetate of formula (VII)



in which R represents alkyl,

with an alkyl acetate of formula (VIII)



in which R represents alkyl,

in the presence of a base and in the presence of a diluent.

Claim 13 (new): A method according to Claim 11 in which, for compounds of formula (II), R represents C₁-C₈-alkyl.

Claim 14 (new): A method according to Claim 11 in which, for compounds of formula (II), R represents C₁-C₆-alkyl.

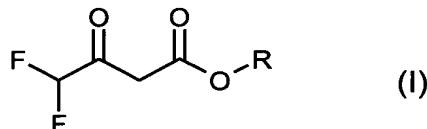
Claim 15 (new): A method according to Claim 11 in which
for compounds of formula (II), R represents methyl, ethyl, n- or iso-propyl, or n-, iso-,
sec-, or tert-butyl,
for compounds of formula (III), each R¹ independently of the others represents
methyl, ethyl, n- or iso-propyl, or n-, iso-, sec-, or tert-butyl, and
for compounds of formula (V), R² and R³ independently of each other represent
hydrogen, methyl, ethyl, n- or iso-propyl, or n-, iso-, sec-, or tert-butyl, or R²
and R³ together represent -CH₂-CH₂-O-CH₂-CH₂-.

Claim 16 (new): A method according to Claim 11 in which the first step is carried out without diluent.

Claim 17 (new): A method according to Claim 11 in which the hydrolysis in the third step is carried out in the presence of sulphuric acid, phosphoric acid, or hydrochloric acid, each of which is acids optionally diluted with water.

Claim 18 (new): A method of preparing a difluoromethyl-substituted pyrazolyl-carboxylic acid comprising

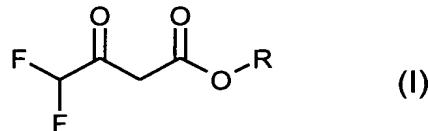
(a) reacting an alkyl 4,4-difluoroacetoacetate of formula (I)



in which R represents alkyl,
with acetic anhydride or a trialkyl orthoformate,
to form a corresponding alkyl 2-(difluoracetyl)-3-alkoxy acrylate, and
(b) cyclizing the alkyl 2-(difluoracetyl)-3-alkoxy acrylate with an alkyl hydrazine to give a 1-alkyl-3-difluoromethyl-pyrazole-4-carboxylic acid.

Claim 19 (new): A method of preparing a difluoromethyl-substituted thiazolylcarboxylic acid comprising

(a) chlorinating an alkyl 4,4-difluoroacetooacetate of formula (I)

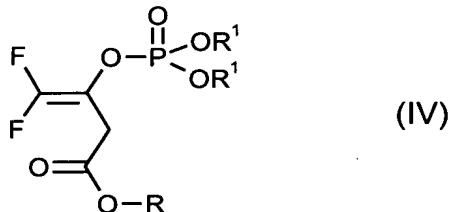


in which R represents alkyl,

to form a corresponding alkyl 2,2-dichloro-4,4-difluoro-3-oxobutanoate or alkyl 2-chloro-4,4-difluoro-3-oxobutanoate, and

(b) reacting the alkyl 2,2-dichloro-4,4-difluoro-3-oxobutanoate or alkyl 2-chloro-4,4-difluoro-3-oxobutanoate with thioalkanamide to give an alkyl 3-alkyl-4-difluoromethylthiazole-5-carboxylate.

Claim 20 (new): An alkyl phosphonate of formula (IV)

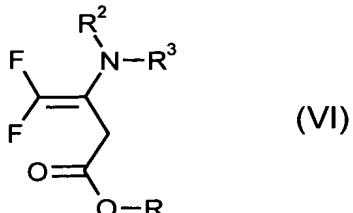


in which

R represents alkyl, and

each R' independently represents C₁-C₄-alkyl.

Claim 21 (new): An enamine of formula (VI)



in which

R represents alkyl,

R^2 and R^3 independently of each other represent hydrogen or C₁-C₈-alkyl, or R^2 and R^3 together represent -CH₂-CH₂-O-CH₂-CH₂-, -CH₂-CH₂-S-CH₂-CH₂-, or -CH₂-CH₂-N(R^4)-CH₂-CH₂-, and
 R^4 represents hydrogen or C₁-C₈-alkyl. --